



▶ IN WHAT SOIL ARE YOU ROOTED?...3

MARCH | 2016



▶ TEACHING FROM THE OVERFLOW...5



▶ THE WORST IS NEVER THE THE WORST...6

Connection SDMI

LIKE A TREE FIRMLY ROOTED...

Roots and Fruits!

by Rev. Larry R. Morris

When we moved into our house, we were happy to see a number of young, healthy trees around the perimeter of the yard. Each one was about the same size, framing the yard perfectly. We anticipated the day when the trees would grow and provide the house and our family plenty of shade and shelter.

As the next year passed, three of the trees grew quickly. The trunks thickened, and the branches stretched ever higher into the sky. But several of the trees were not growing as fast as the others. One of them was not growing at all. As the summer months progressed, the heat curled the leaves of the struggling trees, even though they received more water and care than the other trees around them. Something was wrong.

My neighbor was an arborist (tree surgeon) who worked for a company that cared for golf courses in the region. He offered to take a look at my failing trees. Using a shovel, he dug down a few inches around the trunks, where he found the problem. The landscapers who placed the trees in the yard had not cut the plastic rope that bound the roots for transport. The roots remained in a tightly bound ball wrapped in the remains of a plastic sack. They couldn't get free to gather the available resources, so the trees didn't grow. Having discovered the problem I went to each struggling tree, dug down, and cut away the rope that bound up the roots. The result was restored growth and vitality.

Healthy roots are essential to a healthy tree. Healthy disciples need healthy roots as well. A disciple's roots are those essential habitual practices that promote spiritual growth - practices like the study of Scripture, personal and corporate prayer, worship, and service. Without these "habits of holiness," growth slows, and the fruit of the spirit never matures.

In this issue of *SDMI Connection*, we will explore some of the essential roots of Christian discipleship. In following issues, we will continue to examine practices and resources which will allow you, as an SDMI leader, to help grow fruitful disciples of Christ.

Larry Morris is the SDMI USA/Canada Regional Coordinator.



Fervency Among Christians to Grow in Christ

The Religious Landscape Study, produced by the Pew Research Center, reports that North Americans are less religious than they were eight years ago. These findings suggest that there is a growing segment of the population becoming less religious in their beliefs and practices. But that is not the full story.

If you look closely at the research, you will also see that evangelical Christians are becoming more fervent in their participation in weekly Scripture reading, Bible study groups, and sharing the gospel. So,

while we are seeing a cultural shift away from Christianity, we are also seeing the first signs of a new fervency among Christians to know and grow in faith in Christ.

This trend is verified by the statistical growth in Sunday School and small groups on the USA/Canada Region this past year. We should be encouraged in knowing that the Church of the Nazarene and Sunday School and Discipleship ministries has the right message and right mission for this time and culture.

Congratulations to these USA/Canada districts for showing the greatest improvement in statistical growth this past year.

MINISTRY AREA	DISTRICT	DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT	GROWTH TYPE
Children Children	Sacramento Hawaii Pacific	Rev. Steven Scott Dr. Rick Power	Numerical Percentage
Youth Youth	Metro New York Canada West	Rev. Art Alexander Dr. Larry Dahl	Numerical Percentage
Adult Adult	South Central Ohio Eastern Kentucky	Rev. Trevor Johnston Rev. Douglass Wyatt	Numerical Percentage
Small Groups Small Groups	South Central Ohio North Arkansas	Rev. Trevor Johnston Dr. D. Randy Berkner	Numerical Percentage
Sunday School Sunday School	Metro New York Metro New York	Rev. Art Alexander Rev. Art Alexander	Numerical Percentage
Overall Overall	Metro New York Hawaii Pacific	Rev. Art Alexander Dr. Rick Power	Numerical Percentage

Discipleship is the heart of all Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries. It is central to every ministry, and it provides a clear pathway to spiritual renewal and leadership development. It is the guardian of clear and coherent theology and a doorway to authentic and lasting ministry.

In the past year, we have seen a new passion for discipleship in the hearts and actions of pastors and lay leaders confronting a desperate culture that's looking for an answer to their struggle for meaning and wholeness. As a result, we are optimistic about the future God has for the message and mission of the Church of the Nazarene.

GROWING YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUPS

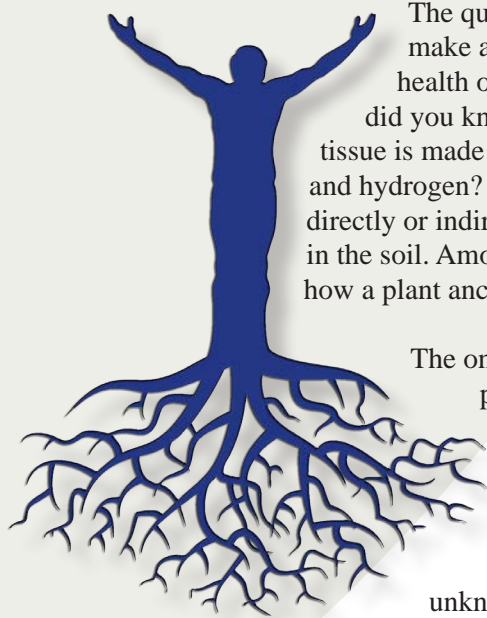
DiscipleshipPlace.org

There are many resources available to help grow your Sunday School & Small Group ministries. At discipleshipplace.org, select the "Study" tab and scroll down to Webinars, Elective. Look for these free recorded webinars:

- Discipleship by Rev. Hal Perkins**
- Effective Men's Ministry by Marshall Duke**
- Effective Teaching Strategies by Dr. Randy Cloud**
- Welcoming People into the Fellowship by Dr. Lyle Pointer**
- Living a Transparent Life within Small Groups by Susan Sims**
- Learning Challenges in Small Groups by Dr. James Hicks**

In What Soil Are You Rooted?

by Rev. John Comstock



The quality of the soil will make a huge difference in the health of a plant. For example, did you know that 90% of plant tissue is made up of oxygen, carbon, and hydrogen? Hydrogen is obtained directly or indirectly from the water in the soil. Among other things, soil is how a plant anchors itself.

The one difference between plants and people is that people can choose where to put their spiritual roots. In today's fast-paced and chaotic culture, many unknowingly establish roots in things such as the opinion and approval of others, what they own

and the money in their bank accounts, or a myriad of things that compete against the fertile soil of God's Word. To know where we put our roots, it might be worth reflecting on what influences us the most. Where do we turn when we need help, and where do we find our sense of well-being?

Being rooted and established in the Word of God means we come to the text and let it shape us. It is not our job to shape the text to meet our preference. It is our role to understand its context so that we can allow the Holy Spirit to use Scripture to transform us into Christlikeness. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us that

“the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” What does this all mean?

The Bible, in essence, reveals to us the very character and nature of God. When we look to Scripture only as a rule book for living, we will be tempted to step into legalism. If we look to Scripture only as a “self-help” book, we are at risk of making ourselves the central character, constantly finding ways to rationalize our preferred way of living through our personalized interpretation of the text.

If we approach the Bible as the dynamic and living Word, we will find ourselves aligning our life story with the meta-narrative of God. We will discover freedom when we realize we are not the central character in the meta-narrative but instead play a supporting role to God, who is both the central character and the audience for whom we live our lives.

It is because we believe in the importance of Scripture that we have Bible studies and other biblical resources available at no cost at www.DiscipleshipPlace.org. This is also why we are still making the customizable, mobile app powered by goTandem available at no cost. Supported by the World Evangelism Fund, these resources are for churches and laity to help them grow closer to Jesus. If you have any questions, please email DiscipleshipPlace@nazarene.org or call 888-243-2767.

John Comstock is the SDMI USA/Canada Coordinator of Continuing Lay Training (CLT)

NEW Women's Devotions Written by Women's Ministries Leaders

Looking for a new devotional series for your women's ministries? Check out the free devotionals from these five Nazarene women's ministries leaders:

- **Becky Brown**, Director of the Counselor Network, New Life Ministries.
- **Cheryl Roland**, Northeastern Indiana District Women's Ministries Director and host of a monthly Bible study for residents of Open Heart Home, a shelter for homeless women.
- **Jayne Taylor**, a retired elder whose life experiences have developed her strengths of encouraging others, building bridges, taking ownership, and being accountable for decisions and choices.
- **Kari Taylor**, a staff pastor's wife as well as a counselor who works with young women in her church.
- **Annetta Turner Sykes**, who has served as a missionary nurse, teacher and preacher in Lesotho, Africa, and - stateside - as women's chaplain/director in the Los Angeles Mission and Nashville Rescue Mission in addition to being a teacher at Trevecca Nazarene University.

Each devotional offers:

- Scripture
- Story/message
- Points to Ponder
- Prayer



Check it out today!

www.nazwomensdevotionals.com

Church Nursery: Childcare or God's Greenhouse?

by Rev. Leslie Hart

"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'"
Matthew 19:14

If you wanted to begin growing healthy plants, you could read a book about it...or, you could visit a local nursery to actually see how it's done. If you choose well, you will quickly discover that quality nurseries don't happen accidentally.

Those in charge not only love their work—they are skilled, experienced, and very intentional about growing healthy plants. And if you ask them, they will undoubtedly tell you that beautiful blooms begin with strong, healthy roots. Although we rarely see the words "nursery" and "discipleship" in the same sentence, local church nurseries present unique opportunities to help children become firmly rooted in Christ. The key is intentionality.

We begin preparing the "soil" through creative caring. Listening, sharing, praying, moving, laughing, singing, reading...there is no single method. Our goal is to build loving, nurturing relationships with parents and children alike. When the motivation for every word, attitude, and action flows from our love of God and others, the seeds of God's grace and love begin to take root.

Here are a few tips* to help you transform your church nursery from drop-off childcare into a productive discipleship greenhouse.

1. Commit to safety. Creating and maintaining a safe environment must be our top priority. Trustworthy teachers consistently following proven policies create confidence in parents and children alike. Church leaders must commit to resourcing continual screening, training, and monitoring.

2. Provide consistency. Schedules and routines that are clearly communicated and consistently followed provide predictability. Predictability, in turn, creates a strong sense of security and greatly diminishes fear. This translates into worry-free worship for parents and cooperative trust for children. The result: healthy discipleship for both!

3. Partner with parents. Communicate intentionally, communicate effectively, and communicate often. Use all available means and media to connect, support, and encourage young parents.

Recognize their role as their child's primary spiritual influencers and equip them to parent effectively.

4. Design environments that stimulate God-centered play, conversations, and learning. Give your nursery a makeover. Create a new name that communicates what happens inside, one that invites and excites. Decorate the walls with Bible scenes. Celebrate creativity by displaying children's work. Personalize cubbies with pictures of children and families. Invite movement by removing clutter. Fill the air with music.

5. Resource time-starved teachers and workers with great curriculum. Above all, great curriculum must be effective. Great curriculum stimulates curiosity & invites learning with scripturally sound, user-friendly, age-appropriate content requiring little advance preparation.

6. Equip adult disciples to nurture young disciples. Effective equipping entails ongoing resourcing AND training. Good things happen when church leaders commit to effectively equip their nursery facilities and personnel. Teachers and workers feel valued and lives are changed.

7. Bless children and parents with Scripture and prayer. Send them into the world with a benediction from Scripture (i.e., Psalm 139:13-14; Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 139:14, Isa. 43:4; Luke 2:52) and pray for them by name.

The gardening principle of nourishing roots to produce healthy growth applies to our growth as Christians. Jesus often used gardening parables and imagery. Effective gardening requires consistent attention and an ongoing investment of planning, time and energy. Providing nurturing church nurseries is essential for attracting and ministering to families with young children. Greenhouse nurseries are intentional, nutrient-enriched environments for spiritual growth where children begin to understand God, His church, and how they belong as valued members of God's family.

*This list is by no means exhaustive. You can find a more detailed version of this article at sdmiusacanada.org.

Leslie Hart is the SDMI USA/Canada Children's Ministries Coordinator.



Teaching from the Overflow: Men Rooted in God's Word

by Tim Truesdale



"My cup overflows" Psalm 23:5b.

As a Christian leader, how healthy is your root system? Is your personal time in the Word primarily motivated by the satisfaction of making a check mark on your daily "to do" list? Are you investing time in the Word primarily with the objective of preparing materials to teach? Or do you pour yourself into God's Word for the sheer joy of tapping into the Living Water that satisfies every part of your being?

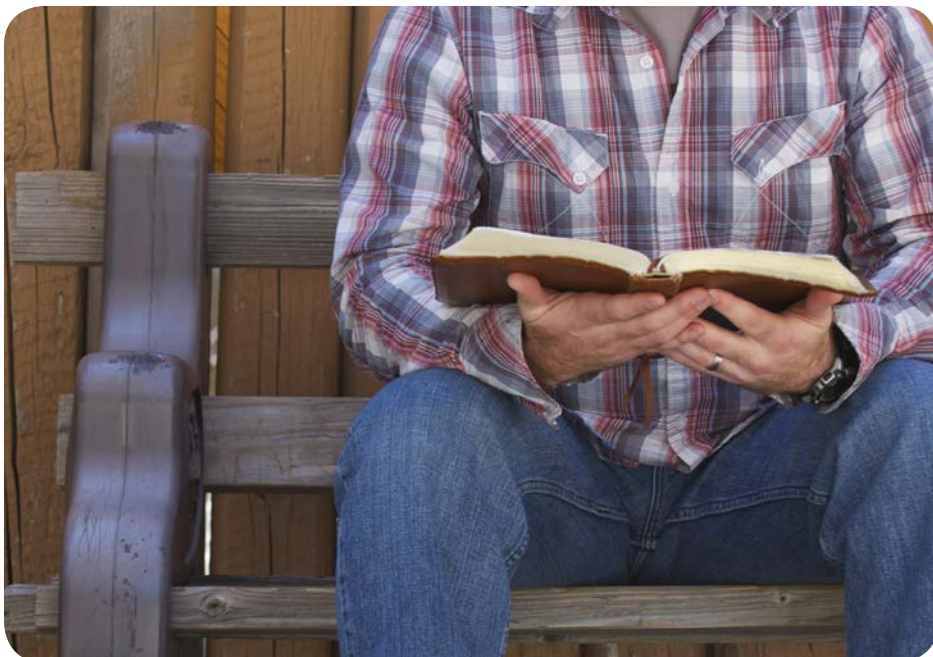
God loves to give teachers of His Word amazing previews of what He has in store for His people. As a shepherd of God's flock, there's nothing more delightful than getting up early and going out to find the greenest pastures and stillest waters that the Lord has created for my unhurried and refreshing enjoyment. I can feel His pleasure as I linger over His Word, listen for His still, small voice, and drink deeply satisfying gulps of living water. All this before the rest of His people stir and move into the day. My heart overflows, and I am truly "full."

From this place of deep communion with my God through His Word, I am solidly rooted in Him. Abiding with Him extends far beyond reading words on a page or hearing the sound my voice makes in prayer. It's the place that I live from, as I have gladly invested my first thoughts of the day in hearing God's perspective on the world that He created for us. And more significantly, it's the place - the only place - where I consistently get the pure, unfiltered perspective of who God says I am. When I can get underneath the stream of living water, my cup truly overflows.

As a Christian leader, you have a front row view of the difficulties of true discipleship. You see the utter darkness of men's hearts, and you are struck by the total impossibility of any one of us walking in Jesus' footsteps (including yourself) without supernatural transformation of the heart. And you have experienced that grace, like an earthquake breaking every demonic shackle, allowing you to leave the prison of the heart as a free man.

But you also recognize the opportunity - day by day, and even moment by moment - to grow up into the freedom that has been bought for you with such a price. By simply abiding in Him and digging deep into His Word, you have unlimited access to the Living Water that satisfies every fiber of your being. And as you stay in that place of fullness, you are involuntarily bubbling over into everyone you come in contact with.

As leaders in the path of discipleship, we have great authority - sometimes greater than we think. The desire to get rooted in God's Word is more "caught" than "taught." Those who follow us will naturally seek to emulate what they see in us. Will we demonstrate how to read the Word as a duty, a chore required for spiritual promotion? Or, by our example, will we project a man-sized thirst for the Living Water of the Word that compels us to sit underneath its beautiful stream until we are so full that we start overflowing onto everyone in our path?



Tim Truesdale is a husband, father of four, and nationally-recognized leader of Men's Ministry.

The Worst Is Never the Worst

by Wm. Marshall Duke

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NIV).

Realistic words, to be sure. We *WILL* have trouble because we are always on Satan's radar. When difficult times come and we find ourselves unable to comprehend or understand, Satan quickly throws doubts and questions into our minds.

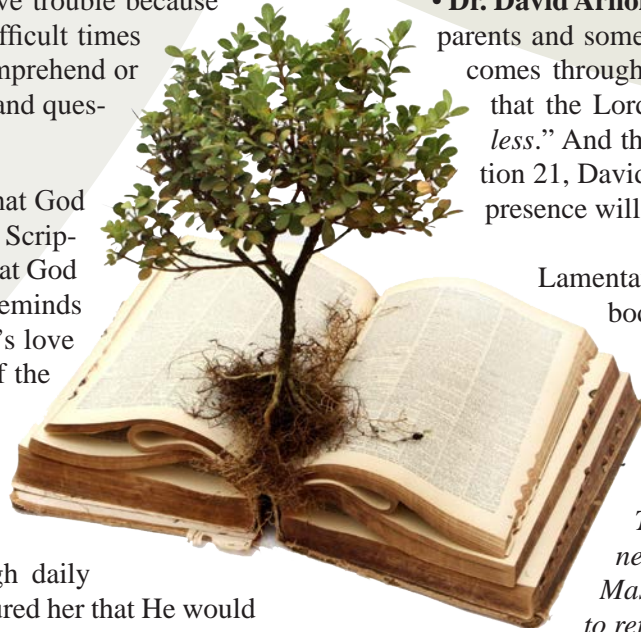
But God's Word confidently reminds us that God *DOES* understand; and through prayer and Scripture, we can be assured and given peace that God *IS* in control. In fact, Paul, the apostle, reminds us that nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:39, NIV), even in the midst of the most difficult circumstances.

• **Betty Hansen**, widow of Dr. Carlton Hansen, retired pastor and district superintendent, reports that as her husband desperately wrestled with cancer, through daily Bible reading and daily prayer, God reassured her that He would be with her and that HE would give her daily strength.

• **Darell and Dovie Hudson**, parents of a second grader who was killed by a run-away truck tire that rolled through her school playground, found that Scripture about death, resurrection, and Heaven sustained them: I Thessalonians 4-5; I Corinthians 15; II Corinthians 5:8; I John 4; Hebrews 13; Proverbs 3; Psalm 23;

and Psalm 43:5b, which says, *"for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God"* (NIV).

• **Dr. David Arnold** misses two wonderful Christian parents and sometimes battles loneliness. Comfort comes through Psalm 68, where he's reminded that the Lord will be *"a father to the fatherless."* And through both Isaiah 43 and Revelation 21, David is comforted that God's constant presence will always be with him.



Lamentations 3:28-30 (The Message) embodies words similar to Jesus' words in John. Jeremiah, the author, explains that there will be periods when *"life will be heavy and hard to take."* But, he concludes, *"Don't run from trouble. Take it full-face. The 'worst' is never the worst. Why? Because the Master won't ever walk out and fail to return."*

So, in the face of troubles, with confidence and on the authority of scripture, we CAN say, *"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid"* (Hebrews 13:6, NIV).

Wm. Marshall Duke is the SDMI USA/Canada Prime Time Coordinator.

Rooted Together

by Rev. Justin Pickard



old, having survived fires, wind, and countless storms.

But the thing I learned about them that intrigues me most is the secret behind their size and longevity, something just below the surface. You guessed it...roots! The special thing about the roots of these huge, old trees is that they are spread wide and connected to the roots of other trees around them. Quite literally, these trees are growing together and holding each other up! That's why you never see one, lone redwood tree; they are dependent upon one another.

When it comes to the spiritual formation of teens (or anyone for that matter), the disciplines of prayer and Scripture reading are among the critical roots that must grow beneath the surface in order for continued spiritual health, vitality, and growth. But just as with

the redwoods, this doesn't happen alone. A family of disciples (at home and/or through the church) is the best context for this growth as roots are connected in an organically tangled network of care, strength, and growth.

In the church we often talk about multi-generational ministry, but what we really need is inter-generational ministry. "Multi" suggests many, but separate. "Inter" suggests dependency, doing things together. What if youth and adults (even older adults) prayed and studied God's Word together? Not simply being in the same room for worship or a message/lesson (Sunday morning), but literally sharing by speaking, listening, learning from one another. It is this shared spiritual formation that connects disciples of all ages to a wider set of roots.

As a veteran youth pastor, I recognize the challenges of this approach and am not calling for the implosion of age-specific ministry. I believe there is a need for specific age level teaching and learning. However, I know teens and adults are both craving authentic interactions that come from an innate awareness that our roots need to grow deeper and wider TOGETHER if we are going to help hold one another up through the storms of life.

Justin Pickard is the USA/Canada NYI Regional Youth Coordinator.

“The Children Are Gone and So Am I!”

by Larry R. Morris

“The children are gone and so am I,” were her last words as she stomped past her husband of twenty-nine years and slammed the door. They had shared a home, a church, and had given their lives to their children’s futures. Now, as the youngest child graduated from college, the bonds that tied them together were too weak to keep them together. The marriage was over.

This is not how God designed marriage to be. But it is too often the reality for couples who fail to be well rooted in Christ. What does “being rooted in Christ” mean for those who are married or are anticipating marriage? The above excerpt from *Making a Marriage* opens a discussion of how “rootedness” leads to happier and healthier marriages.

Being “well rooted” means having a united commitment to Christ.

One of the first issues a couple recognizes when they desire more spiritual intimacy in their marriage is that even though each one has made a personal commitment to Christ, that commitment does not automatically translate into marital spiritual harmony. They think that one Christian woman plus one Christian man equals one Christian marriage with all the perks and privileges. Unfortunately, that’s not the case. For a couple to have a Christian marriage, they must bring their marriage under the Lordship of Christ. That requires an intentional act of commitment to God in all areas of life.

However, under the Lordship of Christ, each person is called to be other-focused...In [the]attitude of mutual submission, each spouse shows ultimate respect and love for the other. Each knows that he or she is valued, loved, and cared for by his or her spouse, under the Lordship of Christ.

Being “well rooted” means mutual submission to each other.

Ephesians 5:21 highlights one of the key elements necessary for the development of spiritual intimacy: mutual submission. The New Testament concept of submission is difficult for couples to grasp, because it flies in the face of contemporary insistence on privacy and individuality. Too many married individuals are interested in finding personal fulfillment, feeding individual needs, and maintaining their self-identity. The focus is on the individual and not the marriage partnership.

Mutual submission in marriage changes the way we relate to each other as children of God and shows the world that our relationship is truly different. When our relationship is brought into obedience to God we’ll see significant changes in how we talk with each other, how we react toward each other, how we seek to understand each other, and how we live in an attitude of forgiveness toward each other. None of these can be done consistently without a holy submission to God and each other.

Once we have committed our marriages to Christ and committed ourselves to being Christlike in our relationships, we can begin to risk the vulnerability that will let our spouses see our innermost thoughts.

In a broken and sinful world, the sharing of our innermost spiritual thoughts isn’t easy. It takes continual effort to maintain connectedness with both God and each other. A key part of that effort is communication with God and each other in prayer. There is nothing that will help a couple build a strong relationship with God and each other like praying together and for each other.

Great marriages are like strong and healthy trees – they are supported by a system of roots that tap into a great supply of unseen resources. Every Christian couple has all the resources of God available to them when they are united in their commitment to Christ and are mutually submitted to each other.

Looking for more information on marriage? *Making a Marriage* is written to couples who want to maximize their marriage by developing a growing relationship with God and each other. Purchase your copy on NPH.com and download additional free resources for couples on www.DiscipleshipPlace.org (choose “Denomination Wide” under the “Study” tab).

[Read the full chapter, “Finding Spiritual Intimacy in Your Marriage,” in *Making a Marriage*, Compiled & edited by Larry R. Morris, Beacon Hill Press, 2007.]

Larry Morris is the SDMI USA/Canada Regional Coordinator.





TEACHING EVERYONE ABOUT THE MISSION

TEACH 2016

A national lay ministry conference for equipping and resourcing small groups, Sunday School, and discipleship ministries

August 12-13, 2016

Springdale Church of the Nazarene, Cincinnati, Ohio

Explore best practices for making Christlike disciples through...

Sunday School, Small Groups, Intergenerational Ministries, Vacation Bible School, Children's Bible Quizzing, Bible Studies, Helping friends follow Jesus more closely



Workshop Tracks

- Children
- NYI and Youth
- Adult
- CLT/Discipleship Place
- Tell THE Story
- Admin/Leadership
- Family/Intergenerational



ENGAGE THE WORD
 SEPTEMBER 4, 2016
 In partnership with
Holiness Today & NPH
 3-month Scripture Support for
Nazarene Essentials
engagetheword.nazarene.org

SDMI New Chair Orientation
 &
 District Leadership Conference
October 10-13, 2016
Save the date!
sdmiusacanada.org

CANADA

GMT2016
GROW Ministry Training
 November 12, 2016
 Brampton Church of the Nazarene
 Brampton, Ontario
 Learn more at
www.sdmicentral.com

SDMI USA/Canada Regional Office CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

USA/Canada Region
Nazarene Global Ministry Center
17001 Prairie Star Pkwy
Lenexa, KS 66220



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK!

SDMI USA/Canada

877-240-2417
913-577-2802

FAX: 913-577-0866
Email: sdmi@nazarene.org
Website: sdmiusacanada.org